

PRIMARY CAUSES OF DIVORCE IN TEENAGE MARRIAGES

An abstract of a Field Report by
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Drake University
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The problem. Teenage marriages are the least permanent of any in this society according to government information. What are the causes of the high level of dissolution among teenage marriages? This study sought to discover the primary causes of divorce in teenage marriages.

Procedure. A questionnaire was administered to individuals married as teens and either (1) still married or (2) divorced. The results were compared and contrasted between the two groupings. The results were presented by means of a descriptive analysis.

Findings. The divorced persons differed in their answers to some questions, not all. They showed a lower level of communication, less commitment to their marriage, and less ability or desire to solve their marriage problems than did those who remained married.

Conclusions. There were three major causes of divorce indicated in this study: (1) immaturity, (2) lack of communication, and (3) inability to solve financial problems.

Recommendations. A follow-up study should be done which increases the number of participants.

PRIMARY CAUSES OF DIVORCE IN TEENAGE MARRIAGES

A Field Report
Presented to
The School of Graduate Studies
Drake University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

by
David Lee Field

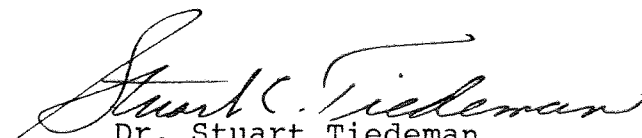
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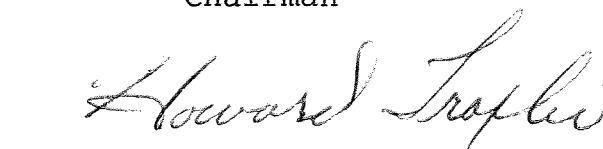
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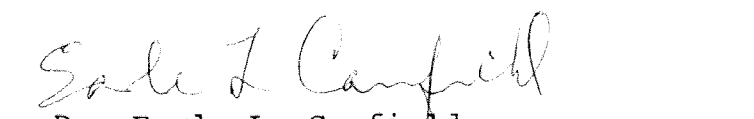

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Is the family here to stay? What about the solidarity of the family structure in this country? Certainly the United States, as a society, is just as dependent on the family as any other nation has been in the past, is now, or will be. Yet there appears to be some crumbling and deterioration in the marriage institution. Divorce, separation, unhappiness in marriage, and co-habitation are on the increase. This writer's strong concern was to find answers to this problem.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

In particular, this researcher wanted to investigate the causes of marital dissolution among those who were married as teenagers. In 1969, one-third of all marriages had brides who were teenagers and fourteen percent had grooms who were teenagers.¹ In that same year, of all the marriages ending in divorce forty-nine percent of the women and

¹National Center for Health Statistics, Teenagers: Marriages, Divorces, Parenthood, and Mortality, Public Health Service Publication No. 1000, Series 21, No. 23 (Rockville, Md.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1973), p. 1.

twenty percent of the men had been married as teenagers.¹ This information has described the already obvious problem of marital instability among teenage marriages. The problem is apparent; the causes are not. The purpose of this study was to determine the primary causes of divorce among those individuals married as teenagers.

Importance of the Study

This study hoped to find trends that would indicate the causes of marriage dissolution among persons married as teenagers. There are at least three ways this information could be put to use. First, marriage counselors could use the results of the study to gain greater insight into counseling with couples who were married as teenagers. Second, the results could help public educators design curricula for high schools and colleges concerned with marital success and family life. And third, the information could be valuable to family life educators. They too could design their curricula to try to expose and work through major problems for married couples and those couples intending to marry. These family life educators could be found in a number of different environments such as public and social agencies, the church, schools, universities, and professional counseling centers.

¹Ibid., p. 8.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There have been many studies done and reports made of the statistics surrounding divorce revealing such data as total number of divorces, divorces per region of the country, and by race, the number of times divorced, age at time of marriage, duration of marriage, number of children, and so on.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE DATA

There is no doubt that age at the time of the marriage plays an important role in the success of that marriage.

Divorces are age-related, being more likely among young married couples than older ones. In fact, the very young marriages, in which the husband or the wife was under twenty years of age, seem to be overrepresented in the divorced population.¹

Other studies revealed similar information. In one it was found that the highest level of divorce reported occurred in marriages where men were less than twenty-two and women were less than twenty years of age.² Another study revealed that

¹A. L. Ferriss, "Indicator of Marriage Dissolution by Marriage Cohort," Social Forces, XLVIII (March, 1970), 357.

²P. C. Glick and A. J. Norton, "Frequency, Duration, and Probability of Marriage," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXIII (May, 1971), 310.

the group of women who were between fifteen and nineteen at the time of their marriage had the highest rate of divorce of all the groupings. And interestingly enough, the group between the ages of twenty and twenty-four had the second highest rate.¹

Divorce rates are going up and the duration of marriages is going down.

The shorter median duration of marriages to decree is associated with pronounced increases in the number of divorces with comparatively short duration of marriage. From 1963 to 1969, in the twenty-two states that participated in the DRA throughout the entire period, divorced couples married less than five years increased sixty-two percent, while those married five years or longer increased thirty-seven percent. About one-half of the total numerical increase comprised couples married for less than five years.²

In other words, if a couple was married when the man was nineteen and the girl was eighteen, they were more likely to be divorced within five years of consummation than would have been true if they had been married ten years ago.

A California study revealed similar information. It showed a growing likelihood of divorce among those newly

¹P. Krishnan and K. Kayani Ashraf, "Estimates of Age-Specific Divorce Rates for Females in the United States, 1960-1969," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXVI (February, 1974), 73.

²National Center for Health Statistics, Divorces: Analysis of Changes, United States, 1969, Public Health Service Publication No. 1000, Series 21, No. 22 (Rockville, Md.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1973), p. 21.

married between 1960 to 1973. Of all marriages in 1960 in California, twenty-six percent could be expected to end in divorce; in 1969, thirty-five percent; and in 1973, forty-four percent. This study also concluded that the "risk of divorce was twice as great for lower ages (16-19) than for higher ages (22-25) with a first marriage."¹

There are not many dissolutions in which the partners are still in their "teen" years when the divorce is finalized. In most teenage marriages the partners are no longer "teens" when a divorce occurs. In 1969, forty-nine percent of the women and twenty-one percent of the men involved in divorces were in their "teens" at the time of marriage.² One of the reasons for a low number of teenage divorces is that sixty-five to seventy-one percent of the teenage brides and eighty-nine to ninety-one percent of the teenage grooms were eighteen years of age or over at the time of their marriage.³ Since most marriages that break up last at least one and sometimes two years, a teenage marriage,

¹Robert Shoen, "California Divorce Rates by Age at First Marriage and Duration of First Marriage," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXVII (August, 1975), 549.

²National Center for Health Statistics, Teenagers: Marriages, Divorces, Parenthood, and Mortality, Public Health Service Publication No. 1000, Series 21, No. 23 (Rockville, Md.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1973), p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 4.

ending in divorce, is most often recorded when the couple is in their early twenties.

Three characteristics of divorce pervaded most of the literature. Low income was the first and poor education was the second, with income appearing to be most significant.¹ Unfortunately, poor education and low income seem to be self-perpetuating. That is, poor education breeds low income and vice versa. The third characteristic was that blacks have the highest rate of divorce. One study indicated that of a group of divorced people over a period of twenty years, forty-six percent of the blacks had been divorced compared with twenty-five percent of the whites.² There was some suggestion that past marital instability among black families could be a contributing factor in present day instability in black marriages. However, there is no empirical evidence for this assumption.³ Marital instability among blacks cannot be explained solely on the basis of

¹Glick and Norton, p. 314; Lolagene C. Coombs and Zena Zumeta, "Correlates of Marital Dissolution in a Prospective Fertility Study: A Research Note," Social Problems, XVIII (Summer, 1970), 95.

²Glick and Norton, p. 316.

³J. R. Udry, "Marital Instability by Race and Income Based on 1960 Census Data," American Journal of Sociology, LXXII (May, 1967), 673; Jerold Heiss, "On the Transmission of Marital Instability in Black Families," American Sociological Review, XXXVII (February, 1972), 85.

socioeconomic status.¹

Obviously, there are many other factors about divorce that could be explored. One set of data showed that a relationship did exist between marital satisfaction and (1) parental status, (2) emotional health, (3) physical health, and (4) social integration. Couples with children and those having them quickly were more dissatisfied.² Spouses who were ill or thought they were ill tended to be more dissatisfied.³ Feelings of isolation and depression, absence of intimate associates, dissatisfaction with the job, low morale, and unhappiness were all tied into emotional characteristics present in the dissatisfying marriage.⁴

Women in marriages that failed worked less than women in successful marriages and had fewer social involvements. They rated lower on the Index of Home Production in one study.⁵ In other words, it appears the women were isolated, some self-imposed, and less productive. Possibly they saw no hope in their marriage and gave up as shown in the low

¹Udry, p. 674.

²Coombs and Zumeta, p. 98; Karen S. Renne, "Correlates of Dissatisfaction in Marriage," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXII (February, 1970), 55.

³Renne, p. 59.

⁴Ibid., p. 60.

⁵Coombs and Zumeta, p. 101.

rating of the Index of Home Production. Along with this, wives in a disrupted marriage tended to see marriage as less of a permanent situation.¹ When asked the question, "Should a disharmonious marriage stay intact for the sake of the children?", four out of five from disrupted marriages answered "no" compared to one out of two women from solid marriages.² The author of the article suspected that a determination to make marriage succeed was a very important factor in marriage success and the lack of it a factor in marriage failure.

FACTORS INFLUENCING TEENAGE MARRIAGES

Now that some of the issues in marital dissatisfaction have been discussed, it is appropriate to investigate the factors that cause teenage marriages. Since this study is concerned with the "causes" of marital breakdown, it is appropriate to review some possible reasons why teenagers married in the first place. A study of "early marriage" defined as "an age between eighteen and twenty" provided some information on the possible reasons for teenage marriages. Factors influencing teenage marriages were

¹Coombs and Zumeta, p. 101; Emile L. McMillan, "Problem Build-Up: A Description of Couples in Marriage Counseling," Family Coordinator, XVIII (July, 1969), 262.

²Coombs and Zumeta, p. 100.

(1) the impact of the war and the draft, (2) less economic risk involved in marriage when society is prosperous--wives can work and parents can contribute to financial need, (3) early contact with the other sex, (4) stimulation of the sexual drives by mass media with resultant inability or unwillingness to postpone sexual relations, (5) tension between parents and youth so the youth wants to escape the unhappy home, school, or community situation, and (6) emotional maladjustment.¹ As a matter of fact, in one study of fifty couples married as teens, the author concluded:

One decisive reason for early marriage in almost every case was a desire to escape from an unsatisfactory home situation either because of parental divorce, separation, alcoholism, mental illness or severe conflict among family members.²

In other words, many teens marry because they are running from their home environment. This, in many cases, may be a home environment which probably has not been a good example of marital success. Premarital pregnancy is the cause of many teenage marriages. Two studies showed that a large number, varying from forty to eighty percent, of teenage marriages were prompted by premarital pregnancy. This many times creates a climate of obligation and not a

¹Karen Winch Bartz and F. Ivan Nye, "Early Marriage: A Propositional Formulation," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXII (May, 1970), 260.

²Beatrics S. Reiner and Raymond L. Edwards, "Adolescent Marriage--Social or Therapeutic Problem," Family Coordinator, XXIII (October, 1974), 383.

commitment to another person.¹

Obviously, any one of these "causes" or a combination thereof have made it easier to enter the marriage relationship. Unfortunately though, these "causes" for early marriage appear to be negative factors. Marriage becomes a quick solution to a short term problem or frustration.

In summary, these studies seem to indicate no positive reasons for marriage at the teenage level. Most of the above explanations suggest negative reasons. It is little wonder that these negative factors in early marriages provide soil for unhappiness and divorce.

"CAUSES" OF DIVORCE

Communication seems to be designated by numerous writers as one of the keys to successful marriage. People who can share their thoughts, goals, and feelings usually have more successful marriages. Many experts believe that the inability and/or the unwillingness of spouses to communicate is the main cause of divorce. Problems start with premarital superficial communication then move on to engagement when it is too painful and risky to reveal the real person. Finally, in marriage it is impossible to keep up the facade and marriage trauma is the result. Being open with the real

¹National Center for Health Statistics, Teenagers: Marriages, Divorces, Parenthood, and Mortality, p.1.

you becomes a mountainous task for so many people in society who are not taught how to communicate in their homes, in school, or in dating relationships.¹ There is a high degree of correlation between primary communicative skills and marital adjustment.² At this point it is difficult to say which spouse is the most efficient in communicating, but it is important that the wife understand the husband because women are the marriage partners who adjust the most.³

Another study revealed that in addition to lack of communication there is lack of understanding and lack of love and affection which are related to poor marital adjustment.⁴ These three factors were revealed in response to a question asked of people involved in marriage counseling. The question was, "What is the basic problem in your marriage?"⁵ There can be no doubt that the answers of (1) communication, (2) understanding, and (3) love are significant causes of poor marital adjustment. They are more intangible than education, income, and so on, but apparently

¹C. T. Husbands, "Some Social and Psychological Consequences," Adolescence, V (Winter, 1970), 455.

²E. M. Rallings, "Problems of Communication in Family Living," Family Coordinator, XVIII (July, 1969), 290.

³Ibid., p. 291.

⁴McMillan, p. 262.

⁵Ibid.

much more important.

Another possible cause of divorce in this nation is the dating system. Role playing, superficiality, and dreamy attitudes prevent teenagers from learning about commitment and perseverance.¹ The fast moving society and peer pressure put a premium on status, money, accomplishments instead of the inner qualities of the person. Teens are indirectly taught that integrity and personal character are less important.

In the mind of some people, they approach the divorce problem not as an interpersonal breakdown but as a breakdown in society. If society would not liberalize divorce laws and make it much more difficult to obtain a divorce, then the divorce rate would subside. Thus, a lack of societal controls has led to the current divorce dilemma, and interestingly enough, comparable increase in suicide.² A recently completed study seems to verify the relationship between divorce laws and divorce rate. This was a state by state investigation which resulted in the following conclusions:

(1) There is a strong relationship between the measures of permissiveness of divorce laws and divorce rates; (2) this relationship remains

¹Husbands, p. 459.

²B. G. Cashion, "Durkheim's Concept of Anomie and Its Relationship to Divorce," Sociology and Social Research, LV (October, 1970), 75.

when taking into account the effects of economic development and social costs; and (3) that though social and economic pressures do influence divorce, their effect is substantially reduced when permissiveness of the law and its implementation are controlled.¹

These findings suggest two implications for individuals seeking a solution to marriage trauma: (1) under stricter laws reconciliation is more probable, and (2) separation is the likely "out" for some couples as opposed to divorce.² Another contributing factor to the cause of divorce could be violence--physical abuse. Research revealed that fifteen percent of the divorce action suits filed involved abuse.³ Certainly constant violence would motivate some spouses to file for divorce.

The lack of individual adjustment in certain facets of marriage can also be related to causes of divorce. A longitudinal study of forty-eight teenage marriages revealed a high level of marital adjustment in religious activities and low levels in (1) the sexual relationship, (2) social activities, (3) family income and (4) child training. The fifth and last category, in-law relationships,

¹Dorothy M. Stetson and Gerald C. Wright, Jr., "The Effects of Laws on Divorce in American States," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXVII (August, 1975), 540.

²Ibid., p. 546.

³John E. O'Brien, "Violence in Divorce Prone Families," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXIII (November, 1971), 462.

was neither high nor low.¹ The areas of low level adjustment could indicate that married "teens" possess less ability to adapt to sudden changes in personal responsibility that marriage brings. Many teenagers are still under the care of their parents when they are suddenly thrust into a situation of providing financial and emotional support for another person. They have not had a chance to develop in a transitional stage between parental care and marital responsibilities.

LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Most of the studies reported picked out particular characteristics of marriage partners or causes (low income, poor education, etc.) and correlated them to marital adjustment or to divorce. Only one study used an open-ended question with a large sample. That study concluded that communication was a key factor in marriage dissolution. However, no study was found that specifically related to the causes of divorce among couples married as "teens" and who then were divorced within five years of that marriage.

One investigator concluded, after a thorough review of much data, that "relatively little is actually known about the incidence of divorce or the importance of factors

¹Vladimire DeLissovoy, "High School Marriages: A Longitudinal Study," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXV (May, 1973), 248.

associated with differentials in divorce."¹ He went on to say that statistical analysis of marriage and divorce indicated that the risk of divorce was twice as great for those married between the ages of sixteen and nineteen as for those married between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-five.² Therefore, in concluding this section, the writer wishes to point out three important factors: (1) divorce in teenage marriages is very high, (2) the various factors causing divorce have not been determined, and (3) no studies have been found dealing exclusively with the causes of divorce in teenage marriages.

¹Shoen, p. 553.

²Ibid., p. 251.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

To determine the causes of divorce among teenage marriages, this researcher sought information directly from individuals married as teenagers, both divorced and still married. A questionnaire served as the major tool to collect that information. Information collected from divorced couples was compared with information gathered from the non-divorced or "still-married." A descriptive analysis of the information gathered from the questionnaire follows in Chapter Four.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

A midwestern city (Des Moines, Iowa) was chosen as the site for this study. With a metropolitan population of approximately 300,000, the city has the influence of a rural environment, but also has many of the characteristics of an urban, metropolitan center. In discussing the number of divorces in the area, it was learned from the Polk County Clerk of Courts that the Des Moines metropolitan area has the second highest rate of divorce in the country among metropolitan centers. It was concluded by the writer that the city would have fairly representative "causes" of divorce with such a high rate of divorce. The writer also believes that the information gathered in this study may be applicable

to other cities with similar characteristics.

The population from which the two samples were taken was the Des Moines metropolitan area. One sample included those persons married as teens and later divorced; the other sample included those married as teens and still married. Business people, professionals, and laborers responded. The writer had no control over who responded except for the instructions in the cover letter with the questionnaire itself (see Appendix). The results were intended to be, and are, as much as was possible, random. Originally, fifty respondents in each sample was the goal, but the study concluded with 26 from the divorced sample and 30 from the non-divorced sample. Approximately three hundred questionnaires were distributed.

A self-designed questionnaire was used as the means of collecting the data. Advisors to the researcher aided in the design of the questionnaire used in this study. An instructor who designs questionnaires was also consulted for his input. These resource people validated the questionnaire on the basis of their professional experience and judgment. Because there were fewer respondents than expected, an obvious question concerning the reliability of the sample would arise if this study were subjected to statistical analysis. Fortunately, however, the study sought to reach into the feeling level of the individual which then allowed the researcher to describe the responses. The

researcher collected data that can be categorized as simple facts and figures such as age, duration of marriage, pre-marital sex, and the marital status of parents. In an attempt to get at the real causes of divorce, open-ended questions were included such as, "What are the nature of your disagreements?", "How well have you done in helping to solve your disagreements?", and "Do you feel understood and accepted by your mate?". Therefore, besides "facts and figures" data, there were also broader statements to evaluate. It is the persuasion of the writer that the questionnaire produced some accurate responses because it took a relatively short time to answer (fifteen minutes); it allowed each respondent to be candid because no name was required with the questionnaire; and it was filled out in privacy. A copy of the questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

There were essentially two parts to the questionnaire. The first eleven questions sought to gather demographical information. This information was not expected to yield feedback that was of exceptional importance, but, rather, to yield background information for the responses called for on the remaining portion of the questionnaire. Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.

The writer categorized all the responses to each question into two groups: (1) those still married, and (2) those divorced. The demographical information (Questions

1 - 11) was simply recorded for each group. The number of "yes's" and "no's" were tallied for each question according to groups--still married or divorced. The results from Questions 1 - 11 are recorded in Table 1.

With the attitudinal responses (Questions 12 - 24), the researcher recorded under each question all of the responses for those still married and for those now divorced. After the responses were recorded, the responses were grouped in order of those most frequently mentioned to those least frequently mentioned. This information is not presented as being statistically significant, but, rather, to relate the feelings and attitudes of the respondents in descending order from most often to least often mentioned.

Table 1

Responses to the First Eleven Questions of the Questionnaire
Administered to 56 Respondents--30 Still Married,
26 Divorced--Shown by Percentage

Question Number ⁺	Categories	Married	Divorced
1	Not considered		
2	Female	83	88
	Male	17	12
3	Caucasian	100	100
	Black	0	0
4	Age at marriage	17.75 ⁺⁺ yrs.	17.75 ⁺⁺
	Length of Engagement	6.8 mos.	6.0
5	Your level of educa- tion at time of marriage	High School Grad. 60 Non-high school Grad. 27 College 10 Vocational School 3	52 20 28 0
6	Husband's employment at time of marriage	Service 27 Blue Collar 60 White Collar 0 College 3	20 52 8 20
7	Active member of organized religion	Yes 59 No 41	60 40
8	Premarital sex activity?	Yes 86 No 14	88 12
9	Pregnancy responsible for marriage	Yes 17 No 83	40 60
10	Parents divorced	Yes 17 No 83	24 76
11	Premarital counseling	Yes 31 No 69	40 60
	with whom?	Minister 78 School Counselor 22	100 0

⁺The precise wording of each question is on the questionnaire in the Appendix.

⁺⁺Instead of a percentage, an average is given for age and length of engagement.

Chapter 4

THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The full focus of this study was on the results of the questionnaire completed by the fifty-six respondents. The responses were carefully reviewed by the researcher so that the information gathered would be as accurate as possible and responsibly represent the views of the respondents.

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

In order to set the stage for a descriptive analysis of the information gained on the questionnaires, it was deemed necessary to evaluate the demographical data gathered and recorded in Table 1. As expected, a large percentage (86 percent) of the respondents were women. This is not to say that women cannot or did not give valid responses. The plan was to have a more balanced response from men and women. Reliance will be placed by this researcher on the fact that the women respondents were not just women but, more importantly, marriage partners. A person's response as a partner in a marriage is the focus, not whether that person was male or female. This approach to the respondent's sex should serve well in this study's endeavor to delineate specific causes of divorce. The researcher will note the possibility of a person's sex

influencing the individual's response on certain questions as he proceeds with the analysis of the results.

The original intent of this study was to obtain feedback from Caucasian and Negroid marriages, but that was not possible, since all of the respondents were Caucasian. The results, then, can only be applied to marriages of Caucasians.

Questions 4, 5, and 6, were concerned with age at marriage, length of engagement, level of education of the respondent, and husband's occupation at the time of marriage. The responses to Questions 4, 5, and 6, were very similar for the "still married" and the divorced groups, as shown in Table 1. Two earlier studies indicated that low income and poor education were very predominant in divorced situations.¹

This study, however, reveals that there was a similar level of education and occupational status in both groups. The question naturally arises, then, "Are low income and poor education really factors in divorce?" The results of this study certainly do not verify the conclusions of the two earlier studies.²

Of particular interest were questions (7) on religious

¹P. C. Glick and A. J. Norton, "Frequency, Duration, and Probability of Marriage," Journal of Marriage and the Family, XXXIII (May, 1971), 314; Lolagene C. Coombs and Zena Zumeta, "Correlates of Marital Dissolution in a Prospective Fertility Study: A Research Note," Social Problems, XVIII (Summer, 1970), 95.

²Glick and Norton, p. 316.

activity and (8) on pre-marital sex. It was the writer's belief that active membership in a religion would tend to result in marriage permanence. This was not the case. Both groups ("still-married" and divorced) professed the same level of activity in religion at the time of marriage, as shown in Table 1. Of those responding to the questionnaire who were active in a religion at the time of their marriage and were now divorced most were Protestant. It was also the writer's belief that pre-marital sex would be more predominant among those divorced, but this was not the case either. Table 1 relates that almost all of the respondents from both categories indicated pre-marital sexual activity. Sexual intercourse before marriage could not be construed as having either a negative or a positive effect upon marriage permanence in this study. It would be the conclusion of the writer, then, that there are more important factors in a marriage than pre-marital sexual experience that hold the marriage together or allow it to fall apart.

There were some questions that revealed some contrasts between those respondents still married and those divorced. The question (9) relating to the effect of pre-marital pregnancy upon marriage did reveal a difference. Among those who were divorced nearly half of them had married because of pregnancy, while only about one out of six of those still married had married because of pregnancy. It appears that marriage because of pregnancy tends to have a

negative effect upon marriage permanence.

Not nearly as common but of interest was the number of divorced individuals who had divorced parents. Essentially one out of four divorced persons came from a divorced home while only one out of six of those still married came from a divorced home. There might be some evidence here that the solidarity of the home in which a teenager is residing at the time of his or her marriage could influence the longevity of their own marriage.

Pre-marital marriage counseling was the topic of the last question in the demographical section. The results here were both surprising and disappointing to the writer. It actually turned out that more individuals who had received pre-marital counseling ended up divorced than those who remained married. If anything, one would suspect that more individuals who are still married would have received pre-marital counseling than those who are divorced. This result might say something about the effectiveness of pre-marital counseling. Not only that, but it also might suggest that ministers who performed all of the counseling in these results should receive better training for pre-marital counseling so that they might be more effective. Either that or the minister should refer the couple before marriage to a trained marriage counselor. The results from this question would seem to indicate that pre-marital counseling does not appear to have much value when marriage permanence

is the desired result.

Questions 12 through 21 on the questionnaire attempted to get some information about the feelings and attitudes of the respondents toward their marriage, their partner, and themselves. This researcher will now review the typical responses given to each question and point out items that appear to have some importance to this study.

Question 12 asked, "What is your attitude toward divorce in our society?" Those who were divorced were generally more in favor of divorce than those who were not. However, many of those in favor of divorce stated that it should occur only if it was "necessary" or "justified." They did not give "carte blanche" approval to divorce but did condone it. Others in favor of divorce saw it as an acceptable solution to a problem. Those who were divorced and still opposed it generally made three kinds of comments. They were merely "against it;" they felt divorce was made too easy in this society; and they felt it was "not God's will."

Those who were still married and responded to the questionnaire generally were against divorce. They felt marriage was a permanent commitment; it was not God's will; and there were far too many divorces granted. Those married and seemingly pro-divorce were not nearly as strong in their position. Some answered that it was "okay;" others said it was sometimes necessary. In reviewing this question, those

who were divorced were more favorable to it in this society than those who were still married. It also appeared that those who were against divorce felt much more strongly about it than those that were pro-divorce. The question might arise about a sense of commitment to marriage as an institution not just to one's partner. If one is committed to marriage, will that contribute to marriage permanence? Among these respondents on this question, it appears the answer would be a qualified "yes."

Question 13 was designed to determine if partners were having marriage expectations met. The researcher found that a large portion of the divorced individuals and only a few of the married persons had not been fulfilled in their marriage expectations. In other words, many of those who divorced did not find in marriage what they hoped to find. The range of expectations was quite varied, including items like closeness, communication, security, and lack of partner's maturity. Those who were still married indicated fulfillment of expectations because of "working things out," patience, and commitment of love for their partner. Generally, the married respondents had the same expectations as the divorced but they found it took cooperation and time to see those expectations fulfilled.

This researcher was somewhat surprised at the responses to Question 14, which asked the respondents to indicate who was the more dominant partner in the marriage. In both

groups the husband was the more dominant, but among the divorced group there were more marriages where the dominant partner was the woman or where there was no dominant partner. To say it another way, in marriages where divorce occurred the husband was not the dominant partner as much as he was the dominant partner among those still married. Does this suggest that marriage permanence is related to the husband being the dominant partner? It appears so to some degree, at least.

What couples do during their leisure time together would seem to be significant in maintaining the marriage. Question 15 sought to obtain some information on leisure time activity. It was quite apparent in reviewing the responses to this question that those who were still married were much more involved in activities which would encourage interaction and communication between them. Marrieds mentioned activities like sports, church activities, having friends over, eating out, and family times. Those divorced tended to mention activities involving less communication and interaction, like television, movies, car races, and reading. Put more simply, divorced people tended, during their marriage, to be more involved in spectator activities as opposed to marrieds who tended to be more involved with participatory endeavors. Active involvement with the marriage partner appears to be important in maintaining a live, healthy married relationship.

Marriages have succumbed to internal and external pressures and sometimes a combination of the two. Question 16 asked the respondents to indicate whether or not there had been negative outside influences in their marriages. Most of both the marrieds and the divorced indicated there had been negative outside pressures on the marriage. Among those divorced, by far the major negative influence they perceived was from parents. Among those still married parents and to a lesser degree the drinking of one partner were perceived as negative outside influences.¹

In addition to the external negative influences, there are the "in house" problems and disagreements that arise in marriage. Question 17 sought to determine the nature of the serious disagreements experienced by the respondents. Among those still married there tended to be four areas of disagreement that caused problems: (1) money, (2) child discipline, (3) parents, and (4) personality differences. Those divorced indicated their problems as (1) money, (2) unfaithfulness, (3) parents, and (4) drinking. As indicated by the respondents, the level of unfaithfulness was much higher among those divorced. Money and parents were problems for both married and divorced. There were a number of other problems mentioned, but unfaithfulness was

¹This researcher does not necessarily consider "drinking" by one spouse as an "outside" influence, but it was perceived to be so by the respondents.

the only one that was more apparent when the married and divorced respondents were compared.

Problems in marriage are obviously going to occur whether they be external or internal. The success of the marriage may well be dependent upon not the number of problems but how the problems are solved. Question 18 asked a two-part question of the respondents: how they felt their partner helped to solve their marriage problems and how they felt they had personally helped in the task of solving their marriage problems. The married respondents indicated that they put forth great effort to attempt to solve their marital problems. The married individuals mentioned that they "talked things over" almost always when problems occurred. The divorced respondents indicated the opposite response. The partner was viewed as being of very little help in attempting to solve problems while the respondent him/herself said he or she tried for a while and then gave up. Some said they did not try to solve their problems at all. Whatever the case, it was abundantly clear in reviewing these responses that the divorced individuals were much less motivated to do anything about the problems they faced in their marriage. Most of the respondents, as indicated earlier, were women. Therefore, in most instances the respondents were talking about their husbands. Those women who were divorced indicated that their husbands were the ones, by and large, who performed very poorly in helping to

solve marriage problems. It was also indicated that some of the women from divorced situations had wanted to consult a marriage counselor but the husband, in almost every case, did not consent. The apparent inability or lack of desire to work out marriage problems appeared to be a factor in the eventual dissolution of the marriage that occurred among the divorced respondents.

An indication of the potential for communication in the marriage could be gained from Question 19 which asked the respondents if they felt understood and accepted by their partner. The married persons felt understood and accepted much more than the divorced individuals. The married individuals indicated a very high sense of identity with their partner. This researcher is persuaded that the feeling of not being accepted or understood is an indication that poor communication likely existed in the marriage. The divorced respondents mentioned things like "self-centered" and "lack of interest" when describing their partner.

To turn around the feelings, Question 20 asked the respondents to indicate their feelings toward their mate or former mate. Of the married persons almost everyone said they loved their mate. Respect was often mentioned. Some also mentioned they loved their partner but sometimes lacked in understanding them. A sense of commitment to their partner was indicated by almost all of the respondents. About one-third of the divorced persons mentioned apathy or

indifference--just plain no feelings at all toward their mate. About one-fifth mentioned bitterness, hatred, and other strong negative attitudes. Others seemed to indicate not apathy but a desire for the former mate to be happy. Very few indicated a continuing deep love for their former mate. The married persons were the ones who indicated a strong love and respect for their partners. Apparently this love binds them together.

After discovering how the respondents felt they were accepted by their partners and then how they felt toward their partner, this researcher wanted to know how they felt toward themselves. Question 21 asked if they saw themselves as a worthwhile person. Both the divorced and married persons responded that they saw themselves as worthwhile individuals. Divorced persons did not let divorce dampen their feelings of worth. In this study a sense of personal worthwhileness does not appear to be a factor in marriage permanence.

The capstone of this study was the last question on the questionnaire. The question was answered only by those who were divorced. It asked the divorced persons the number of years their marriage lasted. The last question was, "What do you believe was the main cause of your divorce?" The individual was called upon to state specifically his/her view as to why the marriage ended with divorce. The responses given pointed out three prominent causes out of six that were

mentioned. The cause most frequently mentioned was youth and/or immaturity. Divorced persons indicated that their lack of maturity seemed to be the major reason their marriage did not "make it." The second major cause was centered around communication and oneness. These individuals were not able to understand and support one another in their marriage relationship. Money and financial problems was the third most frequently mentioned cause. Other causes, mentioned much less frequently than the three already reported, included (1) drinking, (2) different life goals, and (3) sex. From the point of view of the divorced respondent, then, there were three primary causes of divorce: (1) immaturity, (2) poor communication, and (3) financial problems.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine the primary causes of divorce in teenage marriages. Little information is available on teenage marriages except from the view of statistical analysis of demographical information. It was this writer's conviction that the best method for discovering the primary causes of divorce in teenage marriages was to survey those who were married as teenagers and are now either still married or divorced. A questionnaire was designed to accomplish the task of getting at the feelings and attitudes of individuals married as teenagers. The questionnaire was distributed randomly to over 300 people in the Des Moines metropolitan area who were married as teenagers. Fifty-six responses were returned to the researcher by mail. All respondents remained anonymous. The responses were tabulated into two groups: (1) those still married and (2) those now divorced. The results were then compared and conclusions were drawn concerning the primary causes of divorce in teenage marriages.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the information obtained in this study, there appear to be three primary causes of divorce

in teenage marriages: (1) youth and immaturity, (2) lack of communication, and (3) disagreement on financial matters. These causes are listed in descending order prevalence by the respondents on the questionnaire. These causes for divorce were drawn mainly from the response to the question that asked the divorced respondents to state what they believed to be the main cause of their divorce. These causes were endorsed by other responses to the questionnaire. For example, the respondents were asked what they did in their leisure time; those divorced indicated little participation in communicative activities. Also, when asked about the feeling of being understood and accepted by their spouse during their marriage, the divorced respondents indicated that they did not feel understood and accepted. Both the lack of participation in communicative activities and not feeling understood and accepted form the basis for the conclusion that the lack of communication is a primary cause of divorce in teenage marriages. When asked about the nature of their serious disagreements, the divorced respondents indicated that financial problems were at the top of the list which supports the conclusion that money matters are another primary cause of divorce in teenage marriages.

There were other factors that did appear as causes of divorce. These factors, while not mentioned as frequently in the questionnaire results, are important. Listed in order of most frequently mentioned to least frequently

mentioned, they are: (1) lack of male leadership, (2) unfaithfulness, and (3) different life goals. The responses to the questions dealing with (1) how well the respondents solved their marriage problems and (2) who was or is the most dominant partner in the marriage indicated that male leadership was important to marriage permanence and that there was a lack of male leadership in the marriages of the divorced respondents. Considering another factor, unfaithfulness, it seems that a third person with whom one of the spouses is unfaithful is deadly to the marriage relationship. The factor of different life goals appeared when the divorced respondents were asked about their marriage expectations, sources of disagreement in their former marriage, and what the respondents perceived as the cause of their divorce. Even less frequently mentioned as causes were (1) drinking and (2) sexual problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A follow-up study should be done to determine if the findings of this study can be verified by another similar study. This writer would suggest that a larger number of respondents be contacted--at least two hundred. The respondents should be from several cities located in various parts of the country; and it would be desirable to have a representation of blacks. Since the black community makes up about 15 percent of the nation, it would be desirable to

have a similar percentage of black respondents included in the sample studied.

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APPENDIX

TEENAGE MARRIAGE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Present age _____ 2. Sex _____ 3. Race _____
4. Age at marriage _____ Spouse's age at marriage _____
Length of engagement _____ Years _____ Months
No Engagement _____ Number of children from the
marriage _____
5. What level of education had you attained at the time of
your marriage? _____
6. Husband's occupation at the time of marriage _____

7. Were you an active member of any organized religion at
the time of your marriage? _____ Yes _____ No.
If yes, what religion or particular affiliation? _____

8. At the time of your marriage, had you participated in
pre-marital sexual relations? _____ Yes _____ No
9. Did a pre-marital pregnancy influence your decision to
marry? _____ Yes _____ No
10. Are your parents divorced? _____ Yes _____ No
11. Did you have pre-marital marriage counseling?
_____ Yes _____ No If yes, _____ School Counselor,
_____ Marriage Counselor, _____ Minister, _____ Other
(Who? _____)
12. What is your attitude toward divorce in our society?

13. Were your expectations of marriage fulfilled to your liking? _____ Yes _____ No Please explain _____

14. In your opinion, who was or is the most dominant partner in your marriage? _____
15. As a couple, what activities did you or do you engage in during leisure time together? _____

16. Were there negative outside influences in your marriage? _____
17. What was or has been the nature of your serious disagreements? _____
18. How well do you think your spouse helped to solve your marriage problems? _____

- How well do you think you did in helping to solve your marriage problems? _____

19. Did you or do you feel understood and accepted by your partner? _____ Yes _____ No Why or why not? _____

20. Briefly describe your present attitude toward your mate or former mate. _____

21. Do you see yourself as a worthwhile person?

_____ Yes _____ No Please explain _____

22. Did your teenage marriage end in divorce?

_____ Yes _____ No

If no, please stop and return the questionnaire.

If yes, please answer the following questions.

23. How long did the marriage last? _____ Years _____ Months

24. What do you believe was the main cause of your divorce?
